

Tom Horne
Superintendent

N.E.W.S

ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Contact: Doug Nick, Interim Press Secretary (602) 364-1945

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Tuesday, January 31, 2006

HORNE ANNOUNCES FINAL NUTRITION STANDARDS FOR K-8 SCHOOLS

PHOENIX, (January 31, 2006) – State schools superintendent Tom Horne today released the final Kindergarten-8th grade nutrition standards. The legislature passed a law last year (A.R.S. § 15-242) to provide healthier foods in public K-8 schools and left it to the Department to create specific standards to implement the law. Those standards will be effective July 1, 2006.

“If parents want their children to eat unhealthily, nothing stops them from putting unhealthy foods or beverages in the lunch box,” Horne noted. “But most parents want their children to eat healthy foods and resent it when the schools undermine them with unhealthy foods in the vending machines. The legislation passed last year, combined with these standards, will support parental choice with respect to the health of the children. We hope that the legislature will extend this support of parent control to the high schools this year.”

Horne described the process used to develop the detailed standards as follows: “We copied the process used by the United States Department of Agriculture in implementing national standards. First, the Department has a set of proposed standards, which had been previously approved by the State Board of Education for pilot programs. Those pilot programs proved that the schools could make as much money selling healthy foods, as selling foods high in sugar and saturated fat. Public comment was invited for a 60-day period. Over 300 comments were received. The matrix including those comments is included in the attachment to this release. That attachment also includes a letter from the Attorney General regarding diet soda and a copy of the standards. The standards will also be posted on the Department website, www.ade.az.gov.

“After eliminating duplications, every comment requesting an action was listed on a matrix, which was then reviewed, item by item, by a stakeholder panel. The members of the stakeholder panel were not chosen by the Department, but were chosen by the organizations that they represented, such as: the Parent Teacher Organization of Arizona, School Nutrition Association of Arizona, School Administration, Arizona Teachers Association, healthcare, and, the beverage, dairy and vending industries. Each stakeholder group was able to recruit and nominate the individual it wanted to sit on the panel.

“With one exception, involving fruit juice, the panel arrived at a unanimous consensus for each item. The matrix now shows the comment from the public, the Department’s position, and the consensus reached by the stakeholder panel.

“While the dietitians employed by the Department do not agree with every conclusion arrived at by the stakeholder panel, out of respect for the process, the stakeholder panel’s conclusion controls the final set of standards.

“One area to note is that of diet soda. It was the view of the Department that the legislation did not permit diet soda. When the panel met, industry representatives felt one of the paragraphs in the legislation would justify permitting diet soda. Without resolving the legal issue, which would have to be determined by the Attorney General, the Department agreed that the stakeholder panel could go on to discuss diet soda. The panel agreed that diet soda should be included in middle school. The matter was submitted to the Attorney General’s office, which concluded that, under the legislation, the Department did not have the legal ability to include diet soda. Obviously, we must comply with the law, so diet soda is not approved. A copy of the Attorney General’s letter is on page 3 of the attachment.

Some of the comments from the public included:

From a teacher: “I can see first hand the direct impact that poor nutrition choices can make for educational progress as well as lifelong living.”

“I would like to applaud you for changing the policy on accepting junk food on school campuses. I have been fighting an up-hill battle on this subject for years as a Health educator.”

“This is a critical link for learning and behavior and I support offering health foods in schools. It is truly an up hill battle as a parent to achieve three balanced meals a day when the kids have unhealthy choices at school.”

“I am very happy that someone is finally looking at the food our fat kids are eating and doing something about it.”

From another teacher: “Anyone who believes this does not affect learning and behavior is a complete moron. I would like to see our state forbid these items in school.”

“Knowing that the school is finally on my side makes life just a bit easier. Asking your children what they ate for lunch and hearing chips, sports drink, soda and candy was horrific.”

“Bravo! I’ve been a teacher in Arizona since before sugar was a ‘food’. I’ve watched my students balloon since.”

A student: “At home we eat healthy and we don’t want to eat healthy at school too.”

Horne commented: “This last statement reinforces my stance that schools shall not undermine parental rights particularly when it comes to their children’s food choices at school.”

###